

## NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF FORT SHERMAN, IDAHO.

BY J. C. MERRILL,

*Major and Surgeon, U. S. Army.**(Concluded from Vol. XIV, p. 357.)*

**Dolichonyx oryzivorus.**—The well-known song of the Bobolink was heard in July at a ranch on the St. Joseph River, and an old settler told me that the birds were quite common there each year.

**Molothrus ater.**—As in most parts of the Northwest, the Cowbird is rare at Fort Sherman. A single specimen only, a female, was taken May 25, 1896. Among the many nests of small birds examined none contained either egg or young of this parasite.

**Agelaius phœniceus.**—One of the first migrants to appear, as I have seen it on February 22. After remaining two or three weeks these early birds seem to pass on to the north and none are seen until about the first of May when others, apparently the birds nesting here, arrive. Breeds sparingly about the lake, more commonly on the Coeur d'Alène and St. Joseph Rivers.

**Sturnella magna neglecta.**—Arriving early in March, the Meadowlark is very common during the summer. I found it nesting at the summit of Mica Peak.

**Icterus bullocki.**—Breeds sparingly in cottonwoods along the river, especially after it enters Spokane prairie.

**Scolecophagus cyanocephalus.**—A few pairs breed in bushes along the river bank near the fort. Occasionally a small flock may be seen about the stables throughout the winter.

**Coccothraustes vespertinus montanus.**—I am somewhat uncertain as to the true status of this species at Fort Sherman. Mr. Shallis, a local collector, informs me that it usually occurs from May to July and that it is absent during the rest of the year. In 1895 I did not observe any but Mr. Shallis, who knows the bird well, told me that he saw three small flocks about the middle of August. This Grosbeak was first seen by me on May 28, 1896, though their loud whistling notes had been heard a few days earlier. June 1 many were seen in pines and firs across the river, in twos and threes and in irregular flocks; they were restless, whistling constantly, and kept high up in the trees. Common during the next few days, they were scarce but not absent from about June 10 till early in July, when they were again common in small flocks, which at first consisted exclusively of males, joined soon after by females and young. They were now quite tame, coming about the houses and feeding much on the ground, permitting a close approach. I was absent from July 29 until

August 19 and saw none after my return. It is probable that this bird is a common but irregular summer visitor, nesting in the high pines and firs in the hills surrounding the lake, to the borders of which many return as soon as the young are fledged.

**Carpodacus cassini.**—Arriving about the middle of April, this fine songster is one of the most abundant summer birds at Fort Sherman, breeding commonly about the houses as well as on the surrounding hills.

**Loxia curvirostra minor.**—As before stated, the occurrence of the Crossbill at Fort Sherman is irregular; they are sometimes as common and fearless as the English Sparrow. I have seen them in the fort every month in the year, but in summer most of them are in the neighboring hills. On warm bright days in February and March their pleasing song may be heard in every direction, and I have been informed that their nests with eggs have been found here in the former month, placed in tamaracks at a height of thirty or forty feet from the ground. The heavy pines and firs collect and shed the snow to a considerable extent, often leaving a bare spot around the base of the trunk while between scattered trees the snow may be one or two feet in depth. In these bare places, early in March, I have watched male and female Crossbills collect building material, both pine needles and dead grasses, a constant habit being to do this at a considerable distance from the nest for they always carried their loads out of sight, though I have watched them, for several hundred yards when the woods were open enough to permit this. During the latter part of summer there is a marked resumption of their song as heard in early spring. Mr. Brewster informs me that specimens taken here are typical of the former subspecies *bendirei*.

\* **Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis.**—There is a specimen in a small collection of birds in the local post office. Apparently an irregular fall and winter visitant, known to many of the settlers from its tameness and presence about farm yards. None were seen during the winters of 1894-95 and 1895-96, although careful search was made by myself and others. On November 3, 1896, a flock of about fifty was seen on a hillside near the fort. None were obtained, but they once flew very near to me and they were certainly not *L. atrata*, which Dr. Merriam found in the southern part of the State.

\* **Acanthis linaria.**—A regular winter visitor, but varying greatly in its abundance. Their numbers are much increased about the middle of March by arrivals from the South. I have seen them as late as April 11.

**Spinus tristis.**—A fairly common summer resident.

**Spinus pinus.**—Resident. In summer it occurs quite commonly on Mica Peak, from about 1500 feet above the lake to the summit.

\* **Plectrophenax nivalis.**—An irregular winter visitor, sometimes occurring on the prairies in large flocks.

\* **Calcarius lapponicus.**—A single specimen taken November 13, 1896.

**Poocætes gramineus confinis.**—Breeds sparingly.

**Ammodramus sandwichensis alaudinus.**—Arriving early in May, it

passes through in moderate numbers, a few remaining to breed on the prairie. In September and early in October it is very common, especially so on the marsh.

\* *Ammodramus leconteii*.—A specimen taken on the marsh September 28, 1896. It arose from tall marsh grass and alighted on a neighboring swamp willow, from which a hasty shot dropped it; great was my surprise to pick up a Leconte's Sparrow. I do not think it has previously been taken west of the Rocky Mountains. Careful search on several subsequent days in the same locality failed to reveal other specimens.

*Zonotrichia leucophrys intermedia*.—Fairly common in spring and fall.

*Spizella monticola ochracea*.—Rare in winter.

*Spizella socialis arizonæ*.—Arriving about the last week in April, this Sparrow is one of the commonest summer birds.

*Junco hyemalis connectens*.—Arrives during the last week of February or early in March, many returning from the north about the middle of September. On April 3 a small flock was observed near the top of a large pine tree; they were searching for insects near the ends of the branches, assuming the various attitudes of Titmice for which, although having watched them for some time, I mistook them until one was shot and picked up.

\* *Melospiza fasciata merrilli*.—This new subspecies<sup>1</sup> is a common summer visitor at Fort Sherman, frequenting the shores of the lake and inflowing rivers, and following the smaller streams up to their sources in the surrounding hills. Careful search during two winters failed to reveal the presence of this bird, yet I am inclined to think that a few do pass that season here in favorable localities; and that while the great majority certainly do leave on account of the great depth of snow, their migration is a short one to the southwest, where in eastern Washington and Oregon the snow fall is much less and food more easily obtained in winter. I have seen one as late as December 10, and have heard their song as early as the last week in February; by the middle of March they are fairly common. There is nothing in their notes or general habits to distinguish them from the Song Sparrows of other parts of the country, but their partiality to the immediate vicinity of water is very marked, and most of the nests found during the seasons of 1895 and 1896 were in bushes growing in water. In 1896, a cold, backward season, a female taken April 24 had deposited her eggs and was incubating; and on May 25 a brood of fully fledged young was seen.

All the nests I have found were above the ground, one reason for which is probably the great rise of water in the lake and rivers about nesting time, a rise that yearly destroys many nests of this and other low building species. Various kinds of bushes, and sometimes small trees, are selected as suitable building sites for the nests; sometimes in the dense top of a wild rose on the river bank; sometimes in

<sup>1</sup>See Auk, XIII, p. 46.

bushes growing in water; a favorite place is among the debris lodged in a bush during high water of the previous year, where the nest is admirably concealed and readily escapes notice. Two nests were found in young cottonwoods where a cluster of small branches grew out from the main trunk. The nests, in whatever situation, are unusually large for a Song Sparrow and composed chiefly of dead leaves and strips of cottonwood bark, deeply cupped and lined with finer materials of the same general kind. The thirty-two eggs collected appear to average a trifle larger than those of other subspecies of the Song Sparrow, and are more uniformly greenish in their general appearance. Two broods are raised; five is the usual number of eggs in the first, three or four in the second. As soon as the young are fledged these birds leave their nesting haunts along the river and are to be found among the willow thickets on the marsh.

\* *Passerella iliaca schistacea*. — A rare migrant, taken in May.

*Pipilo maculatus megalonyx*. — Arriving in April, this bird is generally but sparingly distributed during the summer.

*Zanelodia melanocephala*. — Not uncommon. While examining a nest with eggs on June 25, the male alighted on the bush and sang almost continuously while I was there.

*Passerina amœna*. — Not common.

*Piranga ludoviciana*. — Arrive during the last week in May and are quite common among pines during the migration, though but few breed here. A nest found June 29 was in a small pine about thirty feet from the ground and about six feet from the trunk, on a branch so slender that it seemed as if the weight of the nest and sitting female would break it.

*Petrochelidon lunifrons*. — Common summer visitor, arriving about the last of April and leaving suddenly about the middle of August.

*Chelidon erythrogaster*. — Not observed about the fort or town during the breeding season but occasionally seen about ranches near the prairie.

\* *Tachycineta bicolor*. — Arrive from the middle to the end of March, according to the season, and breed abundantly in cottonwood trees along the lake and river, forming quite a colony at the outlet of the lake.

*Clivicola riparia*. — Many seen July 16 on the Coeur d'Alêne River, the low banks of which in places were perforated by their excavations. Seen only during migrations at the fort.

*Ampelis garrulus*. — An irregular winter visitor, taken in January and March.

*Ampelis cedrorum*. — Arriving irregularly in April and May, the Cedar Bird becomes quite common by the end of the latter month and remains until about the 20th of August. Unlike my previous experience with this species in the West, it is here very tame. Several nests were found in thorn bushes at the edge of the river; these were essentially alike in construction and as compared with eastern ones, rather loose and bulky.

They were composed externally of light colored strips of bark and flood debris, among masses of which they were placed — as are many of those of the Song Sparrow — and very well concealed. They were lined with the long black fibrous moss so common on pine trees in this region, interspersed with a few blades of dry grass, rootlets, and broken pine needles. One nest was built in a cottonwood sapling, and its exterior much resembled a nest of Swainson's Thrush, for which I mistook it until I saw the eggs.

*Lanius borealis*. — Common in the fall, arriving early in November. A few remain throughout the winter.

\* *Vireo olivaceus*. — An abundant summer visitor, arriving about the 20th of May, and frequenting cottonwood and aspen groves in company with the next species, which it much exceeds in numbers. Several nests were found, all within six feet of the ground, in bushes or young trees among larger cottonwoods, in which the birds were to be heard singing throughout the day.

*Vireo gilvus*. — Arrives in May in considerable numbers and breeds somewhat sparingly.

*Vireo solitarius cassinii*. — Arrives about the 10th of May and is soon common in pine woods, to which it shows a marked partiality; breeds in moderate numbers.

\* *Helminthophila rubricapilla gutturalis*. — Not uncommon during May, the song of the male being frequently heard on the hillside across the river. Breeds.

\* *Helminthophila celata lutescens*. — Several specimens taken in May.

*Dendroica æstiva*. — Abundant during the summer, arriving early in May. Of many nests examined the majority contained five eggs or young.

*Dendroica auduboni*. — Arriving about the middle of April, Audubon's Warbler slowly increases in numbers, and by the first of May is common. Many pass through during this month, but not in such numbers as I have seen in other parts of the Northwest, nor does it breed here very commonly. It was not more plentiful on Mica Peak than at lake level. Early in August the fall migration is noticeable and by the 10th is usually well marked, continuing until the end of September. Elsewhere I have found Audubon's Warbler very partial to coniferous trees, and nesting in them almost exclusively. Here a majority of the nests I found were in deciduous trees and bushes, generally but a few feet from the ground. One was in a small rose bush growing at the edge of a cut bank overhanging a road where wagons daily passed close to it. Such nests as were found here, while varying considerably as to exterior, agree in having a lining in which black horse hairs are conspicuous, and in which feathers are loosely attached, not well woven in as is usual in most small nests. Occasionally one was seen in deep woods by the roadside near where hay had been brushed off a load on a passing wagon; this was utilized for the entire nest except lining, making a conspicuous yellow object in the dark green fir or pine in which it was placed.

\* *Dendroica townsendi*. — During the spring of 1895 I frequently heard the note of a *Dendroica* that I could not identify, though much time was devoted to this end. Two or three males were to be heard daily in their respective ranges, which were among large firs growing on the hillside across the river. They seemed to haunt exclusively the tops of these trees, flitting from one to another at such a height as to make their identification by sight impossible, and their capture a very difficult matter. They were active and restless, passing rapidly from tree to tree along the hillside for a few hundred yards and returning over the same route, this habit being observed at all hours of the day. The few shots obtained were at such distances as to be ineffectual. The birds were evidently nesting, the song gradually diminishing in frequency until the end of June when it ceased.

On May 21, 1896, it was again heard and almost daily subsequently. At last, on June 2, a lucky shot brought down a fine male *D. townsendi* which, although not in the act of singing when shot, is, I have little doubt the author of the song. This usually consists of five notes—*dé dé dé dé*—*dě dě* all, especially the first three, uttered in the peculiar harsh drawl of *D. virens*. Later in the season this song changes somewhat at times—at least I think that both are uttered by the same species—and on June 29, I shot a male in the act of singing this later song, and a few minutes later his mate. Their nest was evidently near as they scolded me with the usual *Dendroica* *chip* of alarm, and the abdomen of the female was denuded. These two birds were among a low growth of firs and pines and were shot without difficulty.

*Geothlypis macgillivrayi*. — Arrives about the middle of May and breeds rather commonly.

*Geothlypis trichas occidentalis*. — Arrives in May, and breeds sparingly. Common in the marshes in September.

*Sylvania pusilla pileolata*. — Taken occasionally in spring and autumn.

*Setophaga ruticilla*. — Abundant summer visitor, arriving about the last of May.

*Anthus pensilvanicus*. — Decidedly rare in spring, a few passing through about the middle of May. In the autumn they are very abundant, returning about the first of September, and a few lingering until early in November. At this season they frequent the dry, open prairies as well as the marshes about the lake, where they gather in large flocks.

*Cinclus mexicanus*. — Fairly common along suitable streams flowing into the lake.

*Galeoscoptes carolinensis*. — Common summer visitor.

*Salpinctes obsoletus*. — A pair found July 2, among the rocks on the summit of Mica Peak, where they were evidently nesting.

\* *Troglodytes aëdon parkmanii*. — Breeds rather commonly. Mr. Brewster informs me that Fort Sherman birds are nearer to *parkmanii* than to *aztecus*.

*Troglodytes hyemalis pacificus*. — Rather common resident; found in

suitable localities at all seasons. A series of skins sent to Mr. Brewster were pronounced by him to be "ultra typical," being darker than birds from the Pacific coast.

*Cistothorus palustris paludicola*. — Rare in autumn, among long grass and swamp willows in the marsh. None appear to breed at this end of the lake.

*Certhia familiaris montana*. — Abundant during winter. This is the only part of the Rocky Mountain region where I have found this species to be other than uncommon. During the month of April they gradually disappear, and only one was seen near the fort during the breeding season. It was not observed on Mica Peak, though it might easily have escaped notice; nor were any seen until about the middle of September, when they again appeared in company with Kinglets and Chickadees. While watching a Creeper one day at a distance of a few feet it suddenly flew and alighted on my leg for a second or two.

*Sitta carolinensis aculeata*. — The least common of the three species of Nuthatch, and usually associating with the Pygmy, but is by no means rare. Breeds rather sparingly about lake level and in the hills.

*Sitta canadensis*. — A common winter resident, breeding less plentifully near the fort and among the surrounding hills. Local specimens have unusually long bills.

*Sitta pygmæa*. — Probably the most abundant resident bird at Fort Sherman, in winter gathering in flocks with the other Nuthatches, Titmice, and Kinglets. Each year one or more pairs placed their nests within the weatherboarding of some of the buildings within the fort, entering through knotholes in the boarding. White-bellied Swallows, Wrens, and Western Bluebirds also did the same.

\* *Parus atricapillus*. — A common resident. Its favorite breeding locality is among the swamp willows on the marsh, where a number of pairs gather each year, nesting in dead willow branches, sometimes scarcely three inches in diameter, and but little above the surface of the water.

In regard to the identification of this species Mr. Brewster writes me as follows:

"After carefully examining your series of Black-capped Titmice from Fort Sherman and comparing them with all the material contained in the National Museum, as well as in my own collection, I have come to the conclusion that they must be referred — at least provisionally — to *Parus atricapillus*. They are of practically the same size and proportion as our eastern bird, save in respect to the bill, which usually — but by no means invariably — is shorter and more conical in shape. In coloring, also, they resemble true *atricapillus* very closely, but as a rule they have less white on the wings and tail, more brownish on the sides, and deeper, clearer black on the crown and throat. These differences, however, are comparatively slight and inconstant, and do not seem to me to entitle the bird to separation under a distinctive name. It is awkward, of course, to cite it as *atricapillus*, but I see no alternative. One thing is certain, namely,

that it is distinctly unlike either *occidentalis* or *septentrionalis*, despite the fact that it occupies a region lying between the respective ranges of these subspecies and far removed from the known western limits of the range of *atricapillus*."

*Parus gambeli*.—Abundant resident. Common in and about the fort in winter, most going to the adjacent hills to breed.

*Parus rufescens*.—This Chickadee is a fairly common resident in the vicinity of Fort Sherman, though more frequently seen in the hills than at lake level. Mr. Brewster informs me that local specimens are "identical in every respect" with skins from the coast of British Columbia.

*Regulus satrapa olivaceus*.—Common resident, especially in winter, most going up the surrounding hills to breed. A brood of fully fledged young seen at the fort on June 19.

*Regulus calendula*.—Arriving about the middle of April, this Kinglet is very abundant by the first of May. A large number pass through to the North, returning in September, but many remain to breed, and until the middle of June the song of the males may be heard in every direction.

*Myadestes townsendii*.—Not uncommon during the migrations, and I found one pair nesting near the summit of Mica Peak. It is an early migrant, arriving about the first of April, and I have taken a specimen as late as December 22.

\* *Turdus fuscescens salicicola*.—Arriving about the twentieth of May, this Thrush is rather common among cottonwoods bordering the lake and river, where its sweet song may be heard towards evening. Nests found here were from two to seven feet above the ground, and in construction were essentially like those of the eastern form.

*Turdus ustulatus swainsonii*.—Breeds rather commonly about the lake and on Mica Peak up to the summit.

*Merula migratoria propinqua*.—Usually arrives during the last week in February and is abundant during the summer.

*Hesperocichla nævia*.—First noted during the first week of March when quite a number of males were found on the hillsides across the river, and also among the thickets under cottonwoods at the outlet of the lake. In 1896 the first were seen on April 3. They were generally flushed from the ground among dead leaves and alighting on a branch, uttered their peculiar *cluck* which, among the dense underbrush or young pines, often first attracted attention to the birds' presence. None were observed in autumn, but their habits are such that they might easily escape notice, and I have little doubt that some breed at no great distance from the fort.

*Sialia mexicana bairdi*.—Arrives late in February or early in March and is abundant during summer. Some specimens taken here are, in coloration, nearer *occidentalis* than *bairdi*.

*Sialia arctica*.—Usually arrives a few days later than the preceding species, and is less common at lake level, but is more generally distributed and more common in the hills. One pair nested on the sheltered corner of a rafter on the hospital porch.

NOTE.— Since most of this paper was put in type, I have received from Dr. C. Hart Merriam some unpublished field notes on Idaho birds made since the appearance of his report upon the subject. He kindly allows me to make the following extracts in order to bring the lists up to date :

*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*.— New to Idaho. Sawtooth City, Mr. Evermann. Near Coeur d' Aléne, August, 1895; Messrs. Bailey and Howell.

*Sayornis saya*.

*Icteria virens longicauda*.— Both recorded as common at Cœur d' Aléne. These three species are therefore to be added to the list of birds found in the vicinity of Fort Sherman.

I may say that early in 1897 about ten pairs of *Oreortyx pictus*, captured near Puget Sound, were liberated near the northern base of Mica Peak, and it was proposed to introduce the Bob White.

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## THE GREAT ROOSTS ON GABBERET ISLAND, OPPOSITE NORTH ST. LOUIS, MO.

BY O. WIDMANN.

FOR certain reasons, probably very 'mity' ones, the Martins (*Progne subis*) are anxious to leave, as early as possible, the narrow quarters in which they rear their brood, and to spend the night in the open air in company with others of their kind. The father absents himself from home at nights before the brood is fully fledged, and when the young are on the wing the mother, too, tries to steal away, but not until it is nearly dark, and when the darlings are safely lodged in the old quarters, and well fed. Of course the parents return with the dawn of day, long before the sun is up, to feed and lead them.

After about a week of practice in catching insects on the wing, the young need no more help from their parents and accompany them to the roost, but the whole family returns to the old home-stead early in the morning, to spend a few hours in play and merry-making. By and by these visits become shorter and shorter,